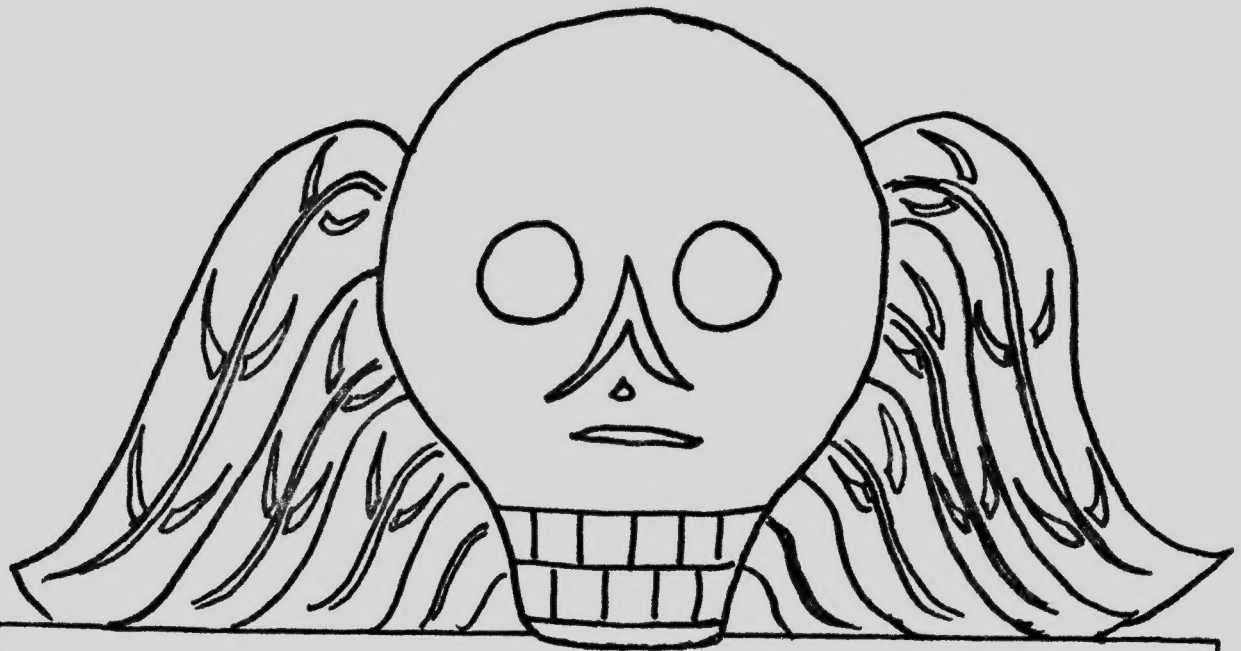


# GRAVESTONES



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HISTORY OF NEW ENGLAND GRAVESTONES

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## History of New England Gravestones

Gravestones are another form of early New England folk art that has served as documents conveying history, information, and the life styles of the early colonists that lived in the past.

As you study the history of mankind through the ages, you will realize that since ancient times man has erected temples, monuments, and memorials to the dead. The early Greeks built temples and limestone tombs. Egyptians built underground burial chambers and pyramids. Throughout Europe, Asia, and America memorials have been erected in memory for the dead. Even the American Indians built temples and mounds to bury their dead; therefore, it stands to reason that the colonists would continue the custom of death rituals.

The early American gravestones in New England were not only meant to commemorate the dead but also to teach the living. They carved images (symbols) projecting their innermost feelings concerning death and afterlife, which were restricted openly because of the strict Puritan belief in rationality.

The early gravestones were often small and plain, containing simple carvings of mystic symbols because stone carving was a very difficult task. The early stones contained only basic information concerning the deceased such as person's name, date of birth, and date of death. Wealthy, important people, or someone very dear to their family might have a portrait or verse added to the stone. As time progressed and religious philosophies began to change and become less restricted and dominating, the later gravestones became less grim and the carvings became more elaborate with more information given.





Let's take a closer look at this exciting form of documentary art by studying the dominating gravestone symbols and how the stone-cutters designed the feeling he wanted to convey to the reader.

As you visit early graveyards you will be able to notice, if you are observant, that there are three dominating symbols in the New England area. These include the Death's Head, the Soul Effigy, and the Urn-and-Willow.

As you observe the stones closely you will notice that each is carved with a primary or central symbol surrounded with secondary symbols. These secondary symbols do not have specific meaning of their own, but are added to enhance and create an atmospheric feeling of the central symbol.

The Death's Head was the earliest symbol. It usually appears as a winged head with blank eyes and a toothsome grin. The Death's Head appeared by itself or with the following secondary symbols - hour-glass, scythe, pick, or crossbones. This mortality symbol was quite popular from 1620 to the 1700's under staunch orthodox Puritanism. The symbolism represented awesome power or death and the soul voyage through death.

The Soul Effigy, or winged cherub, symbolized man's immortality. This engraven image was very popular in the rural areas from the 1750's to the 1800's. The Soul Effigy was not popular with the Puritan officials in Boston; however, because it used nature to suggest themes of life instead of death and suggested the immortal life of man. The epitaphs began to show changes during this period indicating the idea of a heavenly reward after death.



As the religious beliefs in the early 1800's began to be less emotional and more questioning with the evolvement of more intellectual sects, we begin to observe a new motif emerging over the Death Head and the Soul Effigy. The Urn and Willow era produced epitaph changes that began as "In memory of . . ." or "Sacred to the memory of . . ." The epitaph of this period generally avoided any discussion of death or eternity and stones were nearly identical, lacking the more inspired creativity and verses of earlier stones. The urn represented a vase containing the human remains of life left on earth after the soul rose to heaven. The willow tree was a symbol representing the mourning for the loss of earthly life and the joys of celestial life.

As you visit the early burial grounds you will notice that the stonecutters of the urban and rural areas reflected a difference between the English influenced Elizabethan art and the American primitive art. Rural stones were more abstract and primitive, relying on nature as a source of inspiration.

The early stonecutters, also, used a variety of other symbols on the stones. As you explore these early burial grounds see if you can locate some of the other popular symbols such as: Angels, Crowns, Death and Father Time, Doves, Bible, Arrows, Rosettes, Heart, Hourglass, Imps of Death, Scythe, Symbols of the Cause of Death, Tree of Life, and Trumpeting Figures carved upon the slender pieces of slate, sandstone, or marble.



Some early stonecutters included the following who left their mark upon the stones in our early burial grounds: Joseph Lanison, Boston, Massachusetts; John Stevens, Rhode Island; Joseph Hampstead, Connecticut; Wright Family, Vermont; and Zerubbabel Collins, Vermont.

While visiting these early burial grounds, treat the stones carefully, remembering that they are a part of our heritage and culture. Once damaged or destroyed, they cannot be replaced. As you gaze upon these lovely pieces of documentary folk art, try to visualize how life was and its many hardships 250 years ago when the first settlers set foot upon the land that we now call New England.



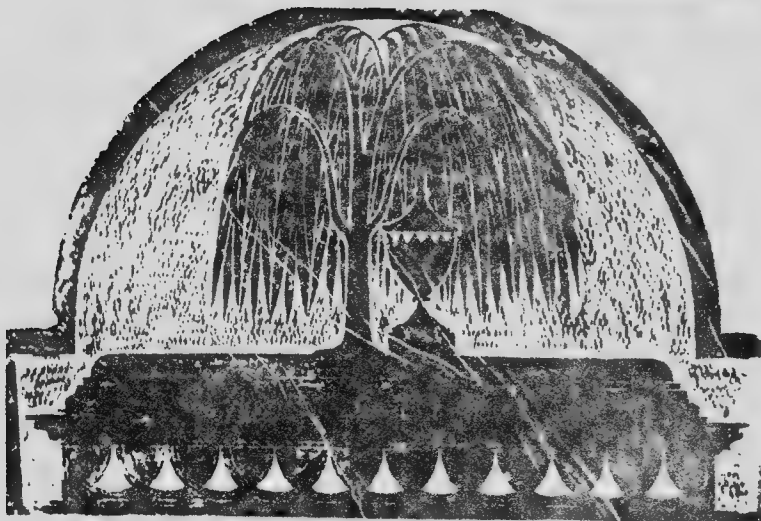
Early New England Primary Gravestone Symbols



The Death's Head



The Soul Effigy

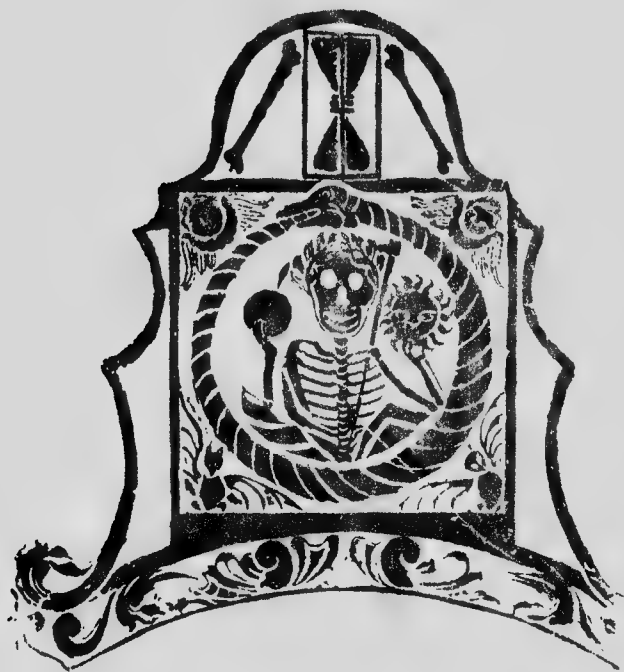


The Urn-and-Willow





## Meaning of Secondary Symbols on Early New England Gravestones



See if you can locate the following symbols on the gravestone above.

- |                                   |                     |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. acanthus leaves                | life everlasting    |
| 2. arch, lintel, pillars          | passageway through  |
|                                   | death to heaven     |
| 3. arrows                         | "darts of death"    |
| 4. bats                           | evils of this life, |
|                                   | perils of death     |
| 5. hooped snake or rope           | eternal life        |
| 6. hourglass, scythe, Father Time | brevity of life     |
|                                   | on earth            |
| 7. laurel                         | victory over death  |
| 8. moon, stars, sun               | rising of the soul  |
|                                   | to heaven, or en-   |
|                                   | joyment of heaven-  |
|                                   | ly bliss            |
| 9. skull, skeleton, bones         | signs of man's      |
|                                   | mortality           |
| 10. winged cherub                 | the resurrected     |
|                                   | immortal soul       |



## Making a Stone Rubbing

### Materials needed:

1. Brush or eraser for cleaning the stone
2. Paper - lightweight, but tear resistant
3. Scissors or knife for cutting paper
4. Masking tape
5. Rubbing media - crayon, charcoal
6. Spray fixative
7. Wash 'n Dry for cleaning hands
8. Cardboard tube or portfolio for storing finished rubbings and paper.

### Steps To Making A Good Rubbing

1. Choose a smooth surface, dark stone (slate) with clearly engraved letters and good, clear motif.
2. Check the stone surface and gently clean it with your brush or eraser if it needs it.
3. Tear off several strips of masking tape and place them so that they are easily accessible.
4. Center your paper on the front of the stone and hold it in place with one hand. Place a piece of tape at top center of the paper, fastening it to the stone.

A second piece of tape should secure the bottom. After the paper is secure, tape the sides, keeping the paper as tight as possible across the face of the stone.

5. Now you are ready to block in your design with your rubbing medium. Using the widest edge of your crayon or wax, rub gently across the paper in large, sweeping strokes. As the paper comes in contact with the stone's surface, your crayon will adhere, leaving the cut away area white. Continue rubbing, blocking in all the solid areas. Take your time and be patient so as not to ruin your rubbing.



6. Rubbing is finished when you are satisfied with the darkness and clarity. Carefully remove the paper from the stone's surface. Remove tape, being careful that it doesn't tear the paper.
7. Carefully roll up rubbing and place it in the tube for protection.
8. Clean up your stone and area, leaving nothing behind that you brought with you.

#### Assignment

1. Make at least two different rubbings. If time allows, try to make a rubbing of the three primary images.
  - a. The Death's Head
  - b. The Soul Effigy
  - c. The Urn and Willow
2. Take photographs of the various types and interesting stones for study and interpretation later in your classroom. Mount the pictures in the area provided of your handbook.



# H A I K U

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Autumn Haiku  
by Paul Bryan Janeczko

Whistling as he works:  
Cemetery caretaker  
Cutting summer grass.

The October wind  
Whips the fallen leaves between  
Countless grave markers.

Fireflies flicker  
About the cemetery  
No one is concerned.

See if you can create two Haiku poems concerning gravestones, cemeteries, or old burial grounds that expresses your feelings about this subject. Remember the rules for Haiku are:

1st line - 5 syllables  
2nd line - 7 syllables  
3rd line - 5 syllables

1.

2.





# FIND-THE-WORD-PUZZLE

Directions: Draw a circle around each word as you locate it. Words may be horizontal, vertical, diagonal, or backwards.

GRIM	TEMPLES	CELESTIAL
SOUL	PURITAN	GRAVESTONE
RURAL	MONUMENT	CROSSBONES
SYMBOL	HERITAGE	STONECUTTER
IMAGES	IMMORTAL	DOCUMENTARY
	PRIMITIVE	

X T O S W A P T E Z Z U F L U O S T  
 W T E M P L E S V O R U R A L S S P  
 M N O I E C G H I T G W V Q I L T K  
 L E K R J R N A T I R U P M Q A O T  
 Q M H G F O S P I Q A W A Z Y T N X  
 S U E W L S A C M O V G M E E R E S  
 Y N R A O S T T I R E S A Q Z O Y X  
 K O I I B B E A R S S X G Y A M U E  
 K M T T M O O U P V T B E B B M T D  
 A T A D Y N I M J K O O S O Q I T R  
 E R G M S E C N E K N B L M U Y E A  
 C C E L E S T I A L E C U T M T R U  
 B P T N A D O C U M E N T A R Y R S  
 O E G A T I R E H T A E P I D W E T



## Field Trip Report to a Burial Ground

Date:

Town:

Where located:

Name of Burial Ground:

1. Study the language on the stones and list the words and names that are spelled differently.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Do gravestones record the titles and occupations of the people? List several examples that you found.
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_
  
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_
  - f. \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Some vital statistics
  - a. Did many children die young?
  - b. Did people live to be 89, 90, or 100?
  - c. Did men live longer than women?
  - d. Is there evidence of epidemics and diseases?
  - e. How many men and women were married more than once, perhaps many times?
  - f. Did women marry younger than men?



4. Make a good sketch of a stone that interested you.

5. Upon returning to the classroom, design a gravestone and epitaph for a Revolutionary War soldier or first settler (children as well as adults) that might have lived in your community.



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